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AUTHOR Ferguson, Dianne L.

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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes what one research team learned when examining three issues related to inclusive education and general education reform in collaboration with schools in three rural districts in Oregon. The issues were: (1) how does special education becomes an integral part of public schooling; (2) how will higher education, research organizations, educational labs, institutes, and other research organizations need to change; and (3) how should families, community members, community agencies, and businesses participate in large scale school change. There is increasing certainty among growing numbers of educators that inclusive reforms in special education must be pursued in terms of general education restructuring and improvement. The Oregon collaborations have focused on helping schools and districts: to develop the comprehensive information systems necessary for school improvement planning and action; to access needed professional development; and to support individual and collective action research efforts. The research team learned that to achieve a broad perspective encompassing all teachers, curricular reforms, teaching reforms, support personnel, policies, and strategies for student assessment it is necessary for research to emphasize change in three action arenas: move from a focus on teaching to one on learning; move from reliance on individual teacher practice to reliance on group practice; and move from an effort to "deliver service" to one of "providing learner supports." (Contains 53 references.) (SM)

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CHANGING TACTICS: RESEARCH ON EMBEDDING INCLUSION REFORMS WITHIN GENERAL EDUCATION RESTRUCTURING EFFORTS

by

Dianne L. Ferguson

University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon

Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association
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CHANGING TACTICS: RESEARCH ON EMBEDDING INCLUSION REFORMS WITHIN GENERAL EDUCATION RESTRUCTURING EFFORTS

Dianne L. Ferguson,
Associate Professor
College of Education
1235 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403
phone: 541-346-2491
fax: 541-346-5517
email:
diannef@oregon.uoregon.edu

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For more than two decades special educators in various places of the globe have been pursuing reforms in the design and delivery of special education services and supports. (Dalmau, Hatton & Spurway, 1991; Fullen, 1991; Fullwood, 1990; Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; O'Hanlon 1995). We have, or have had, *mainstreaming, integration, reverse mainstreaming, inclusion, inclusive schooling, inclusive schools*, and *schools for all*. Certainly these various slogans have meant different things in different countries at different times, and different things over time in single countries. Some initiatives have relied upon civil rights discourse to argue against separate, segregated or variously differentiated forms of schooling. Other reforms have focused more on how to incorporate specially designed, technically different, but needed teaching practices into general education settings and activities. Some reforms emphasized the needs of students with relatively mild, but troublesome, learning differences; others emphasized the needs of students with significant, even quite severe and multiple disabilities.

Despite these differences in meaning and focus a common vision of what these variously named reforms might mean is definitely emerging. In different ways, some countries have reached the conclusion that people with disabilities have a natural and rightful place in our societies. Schools, as one part of that society, should mirror this broader commitment. Of course, it is the resultant discussions, dilemmas, challenges, and questions that have occupied educators ever since as they have tried to understand not just what such a commitment might mean, but how to make it happen.

After years of research and effort pursuing a greater understanding of this commitment to inclusion, there is now increasing certainty among a growing number of educators that inclusive reforms in special education must be pursued in terms of the general education restructuring and improvement (Ferguson, 1995; Berres, Ferguson, Knoblock & Woods, 1996; NASBE, 1990; Pearman, Huang, Barnhart, & Mellblom, 1992; Sailor & Skirtic, 1995; Skirtic, 1995; Tetler, 1995). Indeed, some have argued that unless this merging of effort occurs, special education reforms will only achieve partial success at best and may even end up reinforcing and maintaining the very assumptions and practices that the reforms seek to change in the first place.

The question of what needs to change in schools seems much larger than inclusion, special educators, or students with disabilities. It is about what schooling should be and could accomplish. As Eliot Eisner has put it, the question is "What really counts in schools?" (Eisner, 1991). Answering Eisner's question in the day to day life of schooling involves consideration of much more than students with disabilities and special educators.

For their part, and after a decade of renewed activity, general educators, too, are realizing that the efforts of renewal and reform that seemed adequate to resolve the educational problems of the past will simply not suffice this time. Doing better and more efficient schooling work (renewal) or changing existing procedures, rules, and requirements to accommodate new circumstances (reform) will not quiet

the need, or calls for changes as we approach the next millennium. Instead, educators now argue, schools must begin to engage in the activities that will change the "fundamental assumptions, practices and relationships, both with the organization, and between the organization and the outside world, in ways that lead to improved student learning outcomes" (Asuto, et al., 1994; Conley, 1991, p. 15; Elmore, 1996). Since many of these fundamental assumptions now in need of change helped to create the very separateness special education reforms seek to diminish, it is just such fundamental changes that might realize the vision of inclusion.

Yet in a recent review Cohen found "little evidence of direct and powerful links between policy and practice" (1995, p.11). Schools continue to struggle with an increasing diversity of students who challenge the common curriculum and ability-grouping practices long dominant throughout the system. At the same time, advancements in theories and practices of teaching and learning are leading to new focus on students' understanding and use of their learning rather than recall of facts or isolated skills. Even more challenging, students must demonstrate use or performance of their learning. Since those uses and performances might vary according to students' particular abilities, interests, and life purposes, how then do teachers respond to simultaneous calls for a single higher standard of achievement? In the face of such conflicting messages and challenges, school professionals are also facing a rapid erosion of financial support and public respect. Not only are they being asked to "do more with less," but they are blamed as incompetent for not accomplishing such an impossible task.

Issues and Actions

Teachers and parents must become active co-constructors of new school communities, collaborating with one another, with students, and local community members (Berres, Ferguson, Knoblock & Woods, 1996; CASE, 1993; Cohen, 1995; Dalmau, Hatton & Spurway, 1991; Darling-Hammond, et al., 1995; Ferguson, 1995). If fundamental change is to occur in teaching/learning for teachers and students, and the dual systems of special and general education merged into a unified system of all students, we must resolve three issues:

Issue 1: How does special education become an integral part of public schooling? Experience and research have well elaborated the complexity of this issue. One of the most straightforward involves how to deliver the specialty and support services long associated with special education. Another involves whether or not such an integration requires specialized personnel or personnel with various specialties. And perhaps most challenging: what to do with the current special educator complement who may not have the capacity to shift to new roles easily?

Issue 2: How will higher education, various research organizations, educational labs, institutes, and other research organizations in both general and special education need to change? In the same way that relationships in school will need to change, our relationships in higher education and research will also need to realign. Can we learn from each other or are the contingencies in such organizations incompatible with the very kind of cross pollination we are asking of school teachers? Are we asking the right questions, or do we need to refocus our efforts into arenas that are more directly responsive to the "definition of the situation" of people in schools?

Issue 3: How should families, individual community members, community agencies, and businesses participate in large scale school change? Many of our reforms have been slowed down, sometimes thwarted, by the families of the students our reforms seek to serve. It seems there is much room for communication and involvement with the families and communities in which we expect our students to use their learning. We might also consider the ways in which parents and other community members might contribute both knowledge and resources to school agendas.

This paper summarizes what I and my research team are learning after three years trying to investigate these three issues in collaboration with schools in three rural districts in Oregon. Our involvements with the schools in the three districts have varied in time as well as tasks. Yet taken together, our efforts are documenting the ways in which schools are working in three arenas to support the inclusion of students with disabilities along with the gradual restructuring that could result in the kinds of fundamental changes that will lead to better learning for students and teachers alike.

Our collaborations have focused primarily on assisting the schools and districts (1) to develop the comprehensive information systems necessary for school improvement planning and action, (2) to access needed professional development, and (3) to support individual and collective action research efforts. We have reported the details of our efforts and results elsewhere, though both our results and writing continue (Ferguson, 1995a; Ferguson, 1995b; Ferguson, 1996a; Ferguson, 1996b; Ferguson & Meyer, 1996; Ferguson & Ralph, 1996; Ferguson, Ralph & Katul, in press). Here I will briefly summarize our activities across the schools and districts. Then I will offer some summary reflections about what we are learning from these schools about the need to shift (1) from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning, (2) from a reliance on individual teacher practice to group practice, and (3) from an effort to "deliver service" to one of "providing learner supports". It is this attention to "core educational practices" (Elmore, 1996) or "central variables" (Conley, 1991) that is required both for large scale general education reform and successful integration of the special education reform of inclusion.

Three Procedural Strategies

Legislation begun in 1987 and culminating in Oregon's *Educational Act for the 21st Century* (HB 3565) put Oregon in the forefront of the national calls for comprehensive school reform and restructuring with goals that meet and exceed those of *Goals 2000*. Hallmarks of the Act include an emphasis on identifying high outcome-based standards for all students with grade-level benchmarks, performance-based assessments, common curricular aims, emphasis on essential learning skills, use of developmentally appropriate practices and mixed age grouping at the elementary level and a new focus on career development and practice leading to certificates of initial and advanced mastery at the secondary level.

A simultaneous statewide initiative called "supported education" called for local school districts to move toward a flexible and creative array of supportive education services to provide a free appropriate public education to students with disabilities in general education classrooms. This initiative has been one of five major goals for special education since 1989. Currently virtually all of the local and regional education service districts have responded by restructuring services to students with disabilities so that they are more fully included in the learning life of the school community. In fact, according to 1995 data, 72% of students with disabilities in Oregon are receiving their schooling in general education classrooms compared to 63% in 1991.

These dual agendas set the stage for our collaborative research agreements with schools and districts to help them blend these initiatives together. The specific opportunity afforded by the reforms was the requirement that all districts, and thereby schools, develop individual school profiles upon which to base school improvement plans which would serve as templates for implementation of the various aspects of the comprehensive reforms. A strongly recommended strategy for implementing reforms was to pilot ideas using action research projects and then broadly disseminate and implement successful ideas.

The *Reinventing Schools Research Project* (Ferguson, D., Ferguson, P., Rivers & Droege, 1994) targeted two strands of participatory research activity, each targeting a different level of the change effort. The first focused on developing collaborative research agreements with a small number of schools. Our thinking was that we could contribute to their school-wide profiling and action research agendas and in so doing would learn a good deal about embedding inclusion goals into broader school restructuring goals. Our second strand focused on supporting the efforts of individual teachers through both continuing professional development and practitioner action research.

Figure 1 illustrates our activities across both strands, by our evolving collaborative strategies which I then briefly summarize.

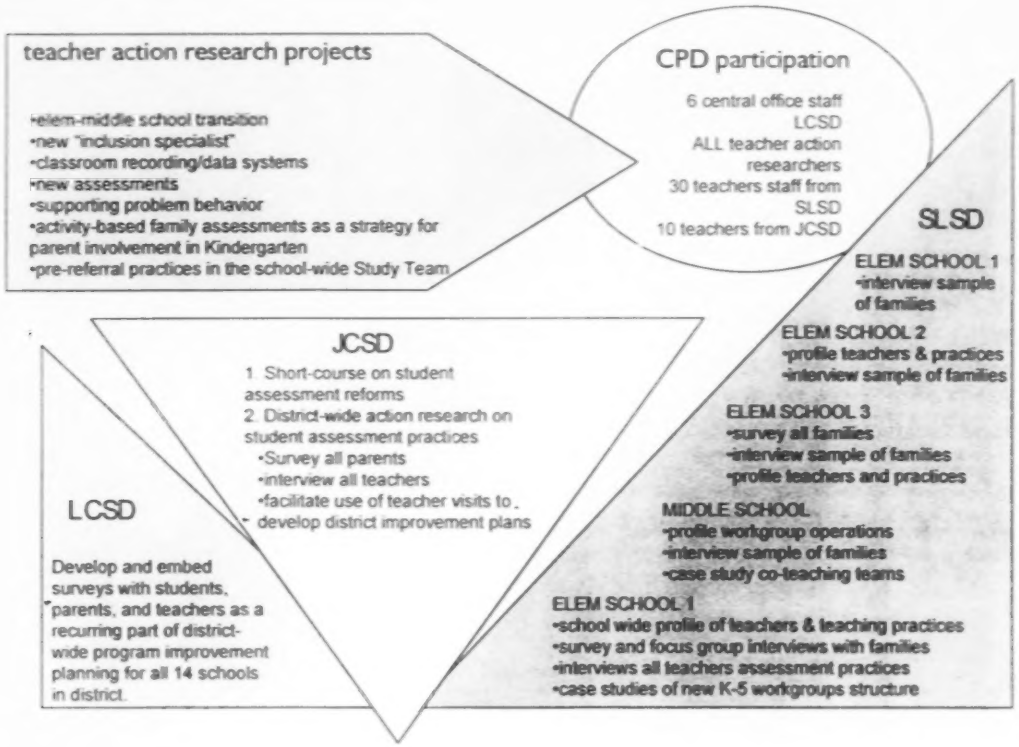
teacher action research projects
•elem-middle school transition
•new "inclusion specialist"
•classroom recording/data systems
•new assessments
•supporting problem behavior
•activity-based family assessments as a strategy for parent involvement in Kindergarten
•pre-referral practices in the school-wide Study Team
CPD participation
6 central office staff
LCSD
ALL teacher action researchers
30 teachers staff from SLSD
10 teachers from JCSD
SLSD
ELEM SCHOOL 1
•interview sample of families
ELEM SCHOOL 2
•profile teachers & practices
•interview sample of families
ELEM SCHOOL 3
•survey all families
•interview sample of families
•profile teachers and practices
MIDDLE SCHOOL
•profile workgroup operations
•interview sample of families
•case study co-teaching teams
ELEM SCHOOL 1
•school wide profile of teachers & teaching practices
•survey and focus group interviews with families
•interviews all teachers assessment practices
•case studies of new K-5 workgroups structure
JCSD
1. Short-course on student assessment reforms
2. District-wide action research on student assessment practices
•Survey all parents
•interview all teachers
•facilitate use of teacher visits to
• develop district improvement plans
LCSD
Develop and embed surveys with students, parents, and teachers as a recurring part of district-wide program improvement planning for all 14 schools in district.

Figure 1: Collaborative Research & Professional Development Activities with Three Rural Districts

School Information Systems

As we began negotiating research agreements, it was clear to us that the effort to work as a whole school was a new challenge for most schools. Many individual teachers were experimenting with various aspects of reforms, all related to whole school change, but few efforts were really *school* reforms – collective efforts. We also noticed that school improvement planning tended to rely on a relatively small amount of information about student achievement using standardized measures that satisfied few school personnel. Moreover, along with teacher interests and preferences seemed to be largely ignored. In response we sought to help schools develop and gradually institutionalize more comprehensive information systems upon which to base their improvement planning.

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Specifically, we helped schools develop and use qualitative-style surveys of parents, teachers, and students that were user friendly and generated rich information that could be summarized relatively easily with our help. We are continuing to embed the data analysis and summary systems in districts so as to minimize the need for outside collaborators for this step. We also engaged in more in-depth interviewing and observation within some schools to gather more information about practices and preferences of school faculty with regard to a variety of reform aspects. As part of this more in-depth profiling, we experimented with novel graphic presentation formats in order to improve the accessibility and heuristic nature of our research "reports" (Ferguson, 1996). Our future plans include embedding such more in-depth practices within schools through the use of community collaborators and partner schools that could provide such data collection and summary functions for each other.

Not all our efforts are finished. We are still working within and across schools to embed these broader systems of data collection in continuous improvement processes. My point here is more that this strategy seems a necessary component of systemic change efforts and one often overlooked by schools and collaborators alike. For us, the information generated from these efforts contributed directly to the content in our professional development offerings, thus tying those efforts directly to empirically based school needs.

Continuing Professional Development

Well-educated and supported teachers have always been the backbone of school reform. Yet all too often our previous educational reforms have underinvested in teachers (Cremin, 1965; Darling-Hammond, 1995). Achieving teacher effectiveness, whether in general or special education, ultimately requires attention to more than the technical and content mastery so familiar to both fields of education. There must also be a broadened definition of teacher roles that includes multi-theoretical fluency, creative problem-finding and -solving, reflective and inquiry-based teaching, self-management, and ongoing professional growth (Baumgart & Ferguson, 1991; Goodlad, 1990; Grimmet & Erickson, 1988; Schon, 1983; Sarason, 1986). The dynamic nature of this process suggested to us that the traditional division of teacher education into preservice and inservice components is no longer viable if it ever was (Ferguson, et al., 1994).

In response we developed a set of professional development alternatives grounded in a set of principles (Ferguson, D., & Ferguson, P., 1992; Ferguson, et al., 1994). The most comprehensive offering has been a four course professional development sequence that occurs one night a week through the academic year with a two-week intensive course in June. During the period since Fall 1992 we have had roughly 250 teachers and other school staff participate in this course sequence, around 35-40 of these participants have been from the districts with which we have also pursued collaborative research. An important component of our professional development efforts has been to achieve as much diversity as possible in our participants. Currently, for example, we have 8 graduate students preparing for initial licensure in special education, 13 general educators, 15 special educators, 6 substitute teachers, 4 educational assistants, 4 administrators or district consultants, 2 adult service professionals, and 2 family/school board members.

In two of these districts we have also provided shorter courses on student assessment reforms. These short sources involved 5 session of 2 hours each spread over a ten week period. At the end of each short course, participants peer-taught the faculty in their own buildings usually in a 2-3 session format spread over 3-5 weeks.

Individual and Collective Action Research

Our final strategy for collaborating with the school improvement efforts are three targeted districts involved working with individual teachers to use an action research approach to implementing reforms in their own practice. The teachers involved have all also participated in the year long professional development course sequence, and in most cases, their action research efforts targeted using some idea, tool, or approach gleaned from that professional development. In this way the content of the professional development efforts were validated through the individual teacher action research projects.

Currently in JCSD we are supporting a district-wide action research effort to better inform all teachers about innovative teaching and student assessment practices. In the next two months we will provide a process for teachers to document and analyze information collected during teacher visits to other schools in preparation for more specific recommendations for district resources allocation to support district improvement targets.

Focusing Change in Three Action Arenas

Unfortunately, and certainly unintentionally, much of the professional and popular literature about inclusion has focused attention on "all students", which is fast becoming special education advocacy code for trying to ensure the rights of still excluded learners. Yet for the values embedded in the notion of inclusion to ever be obtained in our schools, we must not be misdirected to focus just on all **students**. Rather, we must enlarge our perspective to **all** teachers, **all** curricular reforms, **all** teaching reforms, **all** support personnel, **all** policies, **all** strategies for student assessment, and so on.

Our experiences with the schools, districts, and teachers involved in our research and professional development efforts suggest that achieving this larger perspective, as well as durable change in the core of educational practice, will involve activity in three action arenas. Indeed, nearly all the specific work in our collaborative research agreements has focused within one or more of these arenas where action and attention is shifting (1) from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning, (2) from a reliance on individual teacher practice to group practice, and (3) from an effort to "deliver service" to one of "providing learner supports".

From a focus on teaching to a focus on learning

Historically we have cared most about what students *know*. Teachers must "cover" content, making sure that as many students as possible remember it all. We've assured ourselves that our schools are doing well through the scores students achieve on tests which measure their acquisition of this content – at least until the test is over. Much teacher work involved introducing new material, giving students various opportunities to practice remembering that content, and assuring all of us of their success by frequently testing memory and mastery in preparation for the official achievement assessments.

The confluence of demands upon schools as we move toward the largely unknown challenges of the next century is slowly shifting educators' focus away from what gets taught to what gets learned, and used. Elementary and secondary teachers in all the schools we've been working are experimenting with new curricular and teaching approaches that emphasize students' mastery not just of facts and content, but also of essential thinking skills like problem-solving, analysis, collaboration, and experimentation. Rather than measuring what students have remembered about what we've taught, educators are as interested in how students can demonstrate that they understand and can use whatever they've learned in school and in their various pursuits outside of school.

Many promising curricular and instructional approaches have emerged in general education. Some teachers, for example, design learning unique to each student through the logic of multiple intelligences and learning styles as well as various forms of direct skill teaching. The technology of brain imaging and related neurological research is supporting a wide range of long-used teaching practice and encouraging the development of new ones (e.g., Sylwester, 1995). Learning is increasingly active, requiring students not just to listen, but to learn by doing. Teachers are turning to projects, exhibitions, portfolios, along with other kinds of curriculum-based information and measurement strategies, to learn what students have learned and can do with their learning (e.g., Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Falk, 1995; Fogarty, 1995; Harmin, 1994; Valencia, Hiebert & Afflerbach, 1994). The increasing availability of the Internet offers students an opportunity to access many forms of primary data in ways that are flexible, non-linear, and responsive to individual student interests and approaches to learning.

The values and logic behind these (and other) approaches can be extremely powerful when extended to all kinds of diverse learners, including special education labeled students. Nevertheless, this is also an area of schooling where the "cross-pollination" between general and special educators has yet to occur very thoroughly. For example, special educators have used activity-based assessment, individually-tailored curriculum, and locally-referenced, community-based instruction for some time now. They created these approaches precisely because they were concerned to use time well for students who might find learning difficult and labor intensive. Directly teaching students in ways that emphasized how they used their learning not only saved valuable time, but for some students was the only way for them to really appreciate their need to learn. For their part, general educators working with innovative designs of curriculum and teaching stretch their application to only part of the diverse students in schools today. Special education students generally fall outside the pale of such innovations in the minds of most general educators (and special educators familiar with them) even when the ideas and techniques would actually enrich and enable the learning of students with disabilities.

A major stumbling block in the synthesis of approaches that have emerged from both general and special education has been the documentation and reporting of student learning, both because standard grading and achievement measurement practices uncomfortably fit the new curriculum strategies, as well as because annually-written IEP goals and objectives rarely reflect or document all students actually learn in general education contexts.

Standards? Or Standardization?

There is great confusion among teachers about the role of *higher, national, standards* for learning and the incorporation of diverse learning agendas and accomplishments (Gagnon, 1995; McLaughlin, Shepard & O'Day, 1995; Oregon Department of Education Performance Standards, 1996; United States Department of Education, Special Education Programs, 1996). Does "standard" mean standardization in the sense of every student accomplishing exactly the same thing to the same picture of mastery, performance or other measurement? If so, how can any standard accommodate diverse students – especially students with disabilities? If the call for higher national standards means that children really excel – push themselves to do, know, understand just a little more than they thought they could – then how can we compare the achievement of high standards from one student to the next? Never mind, from one school, one district, one state to the next.

Our work with schools suggests that the entire standards discussion is confusing the requirements of program evaluation – *i.e. how well are our schools helping students* ***collectively*** *achieve our articulated standards of learning accomplishment?* – with teacher, student, and parent needs for individual student evaluation – *how is Sarah accomplishing our articulated standards of learning*

accomplishment? And how does that make sense for her? Within any group of students, learning accomplishment for some proportion of the group will not necessarily look or be exactly the same as for others in the group. In fact, it would be very surprising if there weren't several different patterns of accomplishment in any group of students.

Finding a way to legitimate that some students in any group can accomplish a "standard" in different ways is at the heart of the standards dilemma. If "accomplishment" can mean different things for different students – certainly a logical outcome of the individually tailored curriculum and teaching practices being encouraged – then the various student accomplishments are difficult to "add up" in any straightforward way. Yet adding up accomplishments against a single defined standard is the essential requirement of program assessment. If everyone is achieving the standards in different ways, how can we know how well our schools are doing collectively?

This dilemma is possible to resolve if the requirements of program assessment are separated from the requirements of student assessment. Interestingly, parents interviewed and surveyed across one district and several other schools in our projects have indicated that the most informative ways for them to learn about their child's learning is through parent-teacher conferences, personal contact with teachers and other school personnel and seeing their children use their learning in their day-to-day lives. Reports, grades, and testing follow, in order of importance and usefulness. Others (e.g., Shepard & Bliem, 1995) investigating parent's preferences for information are also finding that traditional measures are viewed as less informative than some of the emerging performance-based assessments that focus more on individual student growth than acquisition of some standard.

It seems to me that every student and parent should receive individual feedback about how well the student is learning, how much growth she has accomplished during some period of time, and how his or her accomplishments compare to the national or community standard established for our students as a group. However, discretion must be possible in letting any individual student know how he or she is compared to others. There is no safety in numbers when your own individual achievement is compared. Teachers and parents should have the discretion to filter the comparative message for individual students in ways that encourage and enable interest and effort rather than discourage and disable it. Without interest and effort, learning is shallowly compulsory and soon divorced from use and pursuit.

At the same time, all students' various accomplishments can be summarized in individually anonymous ways to answer the question of how any particular school is achieving whatever the relevant agreed-upon standard for the students is collectively. In this way, the needs of program assessment and comparison can be met, while leaving the revelations of any particular student's accomplishment in the hands of teachers and parents – surely the best suited to decide. Those students within any group who do not achieve to some collective benchmark might have very good reasons for not doing so while still achieving the more general standard of excellent achievement in a particular area of focus, whether a common curriculum goal, an essential skill, or a learning outcome that emphasizes integration and use of learning in novel ways and situations. The interpretation of the meaning of accomplishment for individual students should rest with those most intimate with the student's learning. An accomplishment rate of 60-80% for any group of students on any collective benchmark would likely tell a school that they are teaching everyone well, and that 20-40% of their students are accomplishing the benchmark in unique ways (Reynolds, Zetlin & Wang, 1993). As in all good program assessment, the appropriateness of the collective data is best judged and used by those closest to the operation of the program. It is the teachers, staff and families that can best determine how the range of results reflects the students with whom they work or whether the collective results should encourage revision of curriculum and teaching practices.

Like changes in curriculum, this shift in focus on student learning and accomplishments will also require restructured teacher planning, new assessment strategies, and less reliance on proscribed curricula. But achieving such changes requires working in two additional arenas.

From Individual to Group Practice

Our current system has created teachers with different knowledge and information that is differently legitimated. General educators sometimes **know** some important things about the learners with disabilities integrated into their classrooms, but their status as "general" educators makes that knowledge automatically suspect and illegitimate in the face of the "official" knowledge possessed by special educators whose labels matched the student's. Even though general educators often spend more time observing and interacting with labeled students integrated in their classrooms, their presumed proper role and responsibility is to accept and implement the special educator's expertise as the system's approved specialist in teaching and learning for students with labels. As Seymour Sarason (1990) sees the situation,

> *School personnel are graduates of our colleges and universities. It is there that they learn there are at least two types of human beings, and if you choose to work with one of them you render yourself legally and conceptually incompetent to work with others (p. 258).*

Our research demonstrates that these assumptions do not hold up in practice, but more importantly, they can easily get in the way of effective learning for students with disabilities (Ferguson, 1996; Ferguson & Meyer, 1996; Ferguson, et al., 1992; Ferguson, Ralph, & Katul (in press); Ferguson, Ralph, Katul & Cameron, in review). The nearly hundred year history of sorting and separating both students and teachers has resulted in very little common ground. General and special educators know a few of the same things about schools, teaching, and learning, but most of the knowledge and skills they rely upon to fulfill their professional responsibilities seem so unique – even mysterious – that sometimes they must feel as if they are barely in the same profession. Legitimating one teacher's knowledge over another is an artifact of our history that is just as insupportable as creating the separations in the first place. It seems clear to me that rethinking our approach to inclusion as but one dimension of a broader general education restructuring must have as one of its goals to increase the common ground of knowledge and skills between general and special educators.

Having said that, let me hasten to add that I am not arguing for **all** educators to become "generalists" or "Super Teachers" who are presumed to possess **all** the skills and information needed to serve the learning of **all** students. I think it very unlikely that anyone could possibly achieve such mastery and competence. Rather, instead of assigning only one teacher to a classroom of 20 or more learners, or to a content area with instructional responsibility for 150-250 students, groups of teachers be collectively responsible for groups of diverse learners. Only through group practice will educators be able to combine their talents and information and work together to meet the demands of student diversity in ways that retain the benefits and overcome the limits of past practice.

These groups of teachers can bring to the task both a common store of knowledge and skills, but also different areas of specialty. In order to achieve a shift from individual to group teaching practice, we must build upon the current collaboration initiatives among educational professionals in two ways. If collaboration means anything at all, surely it means that two or more people create an outcome for a student that no one of them could have created alone. Group practice creates just such an ongoing, dynamic context, helping educators with varying abilities to contribute to the kind of synergy necessary for effective collaboration.

Replace restrictive assignments with shared assignments.

Current teacher licensure practices tend to be restrictive, limiting the students an educator can teach to specific categories. Of course, some of these categories are broader than others, ranging from specific disabilities ("LD" or "MR" certifications for learning disabilities and mental retardation respectively) to "levels" of students ("mild", "severe") to disability types and particular ages (secondary severe, or elementary LD). One key feature of mixed-ability group teaching practice, particularly as we await changes in certification requirements to reflect the restructuring of schools, is that teachers share working with all children and youth as part of a team, regardless of their formal preparation or the labels on their certification. This step seems critical because it is one of the most efficient ways for teachers more narrowly educated to "cross-pollinate", quickly increasing the size of their common ground. More importantly, shared assignments create the contexts in which genuine collaboration can occur.

We have encountered a number of schools pursuing group practice through shared assignments. A common first step among special educators is to assign various special education support staff within a building – resource room teacher, speech/language specialist, Title 1 teacher, previous self-contained classroom teacher – to a smaller number of classrooms where they can be responsible for students with all the labels they had each separately served across a much larger number of classrooms. While the previous resource room teacher may feel unprepared to assist the student with significant multiple disabilities, learning how to gather that information from colleagues with different specialties is a "step on the way" to more complete group practice with general educators.

Other schools we know are beginning to create group practice work groups that include some number of general educators as well as one or more special educators and other certified or classified support staff. Just this year, one of the SLSD elementary schools reorganized into three smaller "vertical" communities. Each includes classroom teachers from kindergarten to grade 5 as well as a special educator and a number of classroom assistants previously assigned either to special education or Title 1. These new groups are just beginning to construct the kinds of working relationships that will support their various efforts to change their teaching practices, improve literacy, experiment with multiple intelligences theory, and develop better student assessment systems for what they actually teach, but already there are new roles for the special educators as members of the workgroups.

Two of the workgroups have already begun designing curriculum together. Since they are part of the discussion from the beginning, the special educators can help tailor the development of the various learning objectives, activities, and assessment tools to better incorporate the unique learning of labeled students. Being part of the design of general education curriculum from the beginning means that special educators no longer have to try to "fit" labeled students into a completed plan. It also creates opportunities for previous special educators to teach more aspects of the plan to all the students instead of being relegated as "helpers" for those that might be having trouble or need extra help or support. In one of the workgroups the commitment to **group** practice has allowed them to group all the students into smaller literacy groups, each of the members of the team taking responsibility for several, regardless of the official title or certification, each member of the team contributing support in his or her own areas of knowledge and interest to others so that students in all the groups experience the best teaching of the collective team.

Other buildings are reorganizing more around grade-level or block teams, where groups meet regularly to share curriculum planning, allocate resources, schedule activities, share teaching tasks (e.g. rotating the class through each of the three or four teachers when doing a unit, each teacher focusing on material according to his/her strengths and interests), and to problem solve issues on behalf of the now

"mutually owned" students. In some international schools, teams stay with their students, some for as many as 10 years to achieve maximum benefits of long-term relationships among teachers, students and families. The schools here are moving toward a 2-5 year commitment with the same group of students.

In both elementary and secondary schools we are also documenting the results of co-teaching efforts. One middle school in particular has relied upon this strategy to both share knowledge across general and special educators and to deliver services and supports to very diverse groups of students in block classes. Sometimes these dyadic collaborations have worked. Cross-pollinating their knowledge and skills, teacher pairs have become new forms of educators who benefit both from a shared knowledge base and an appreciation for, and ability to access, others' specialty knowledge. In other situations the team teachers have not achieved a shared working relationship, but instead recapitulated the history of parallel work relations between general and special educators. Each takes on their own tasks and responsibilities, balanced, but clearly different and differentiated. Students quickly learn the differentiation and respect it with their questions, requests and responses.

Personnel preparation programs are reflecting a transition to group practice as well. More gradually, but increasingly, initial preparation programs are merging foundational general and special education content and licensure outcomes. Some states are simultaneously shifting from restrictive, "stand alone" licensure categories to a greater emphasis on "add on" endorsements to initial, usually broader licenses. Innovative continuing professional development opportunities also encourage shared general and special educators to study collaboratively with pre-service students as they pursue continuing professional development and specialization (e.g., Baumgart & Ferguson, 1991; Ferguson, et al., 1994; Goodlad, 1990). In this way the directions of ongoing professional development can be determined by the needs of a particular group or school to "round out" or increase some area of capacity, say in designing behavioral and emotional supports or extending their use of technology.

From "Delivering Service" to "Providing Learner Supports"

The first two shifts together produce a more fundamental shift from structuring education according to a service metaphor to one that relies upon a support metaphor. As teachers alter their definitions of learning to not just accommodate, but legitimate, different amounts and types of learning for different students, their relationships with students will necessarily become more reciprocal and shared. Students and their families will become participants not just in the curriculum and teaching enterprise, but in the definitions and evidences of learning achievement.

Our traditional, ability-based, norm-driven, categorical approaches use differences in students as sorting categories that led students to the matching curriculum and teaching service that their particular constellation of abilities and disabilities might require. The standard curriculum, for example, was the "service" deemed appropriate to the majority of students – certainly those within the standard range of the norm. If students fell outside that standard range, the curriculum had to be "adapted" or "modified" so that the student's learning either approximated or exceeded the learning achieved by most. As student diversity has increased in our schools, the proportion of students for whom the service of schooling must be adapted or modified has burgeoned. As a result, teachers seem quite clear that the "norm", if it every really existed in the untidy worlds of schools, has nearly disappeared as a useful construct for the design of learning and management of classrooms (Pugach & Seidl, 1995; Putnam, Speigel, & Bruininks, 1995).

Adding the diversity of disability to this mix seems only a small addition. However, the historical baggage that the difference of disability brings to the diversity already present in general education classrooms risks transforming diversity into a deficit rather than transforming disability into

just another diversity unless the underlying norm-based assumptions are also transformed (Pugach & Seidl, 1996). Unlike the concept of diversity, disability relies upon the concept of norm. People with disabilities "deviate" from this single standard. The historical response has been to frame the appropriate educational response as one that either overcomes, or at least attenuates, the power of that deviation.

Diversity, by contrast, challenges the very notion that there is one way to educate, one norm to be sought. Instead, there are different patterns of achievement and social contribution that fit the various cultural, racial, and gender differences that children and youth bring to schooling. The difference of class illustrates the risk that can occur when the norm-laden difference of disability is added to the norm-challenging differences of culture and gender. Too often the differences of class are viewed in our schools as deficits that impede learning. To be sure, there are experiences children have related to social-economic class that can impede learning, such as having too little food, inadequate housing that compromises children's need for rest, and so on. Indeed, the intersection of disability and class has long been established and continues to be evident in the disproportionate number of children of low socio-economic and minority students served by special education. As a consequence, the life-patterns and values of families within some socio-economic classes – the very same kinds of differences we seek to accommodate and respect for people of other races and cultures – are viewed as in need of remediation rather than respect.

What may help to resolve these contradictions, and to avoid the risk that linking disability and diversity will turn diversity into a deficit, is a new metaphor. I think the metaphor of support offers a promising alternative. According to the American Heritage dictionary, support means "to hold in position", "to prevent from falling, sinking, or slipping", "to bear the weight of, especially from below", and to "lend strength to". The imagery to me offers not only an appropriate alternative to the norm-based, sorting metaphor of service upon which schooling as long relied; it also offers a way to think about diversity as an opportunity for personalizing growth and participation. Any individual's differences are simply lenses through which to see what is required to "hold in position" and "to prevent from falling, sinking, or slipping".

Within the context of schools, the core relations between teachers and students, the definitions of learning that dominate, and the shared responsibility among educators for achieving student learning all begin with identifying what any student needs to be "held in position" for learning. It supports a shift from viewing any difference or disability in terms of individual limitation to a focus on environmental and social constraints. Support is also grounded in the perspective of the person receiving it, not the person providing it. Thus, all student differences must define the specific opportunities and practices teachers use to support their learning. Various kinds of intensive instruction, physical supports, and accommodations typically viewed as necessary only for some students become opportunities for all students to personalize their learning in ways that mesh with who they are and what they are pursuing as members of their communities.

Next Steps

Our studies have certainly not resolved the issues I defined above. Achieving satisfying and enduring change in schooling is neither simple or quick. Such fundamental changes are arduous, painful and slow in part because the task is large and complex (Fullen & Miles, 1992; Sizer, 1992). The dynamics require engagement in a sociopolitical process that requires people at all levels (individual, classroom, school, district, community, state, and nation) to engage in the "phenomenology of change". We must learn not only how to change our core educational practices, but to do so with an understanding of how those changes are *experienced* by students, educators, and community members (Barth, 1990;

Fullen & Miles, 1992; Noddings, 1993). I offer the three issues and three arenas of action presented here as a reasonable framework for pursuing this complex task. Although it has emerged from my understanding of our work, as well as the work of many others, I believe it will continue to guide my efforts to understand and support the changes needed in our schools as we approach a new century. While the task is certainly enormous, it is also necessary.

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